

Some Recent Fiction

Hexerei

THE HEX WOMAN. By RAUBE WALTERS. New York: The Macaulay Co. 1931. \$2.

Reviewed by ROBERT B. MACDOUGALL

APRELIMINARY note on the technical terms in this novel is perhaps advisable. The word "hexen" denotes a professional practitioner of witchcraft, either male or female; "hexerei" is the doctrine itself. As used in the title, "hex" is evidently a recent or foreign shortening of "hexen."

The tradition of hexerei is still alive in the regions of the Pennsylvania Dutch, as a criminal procedure revealed not so long ago. But Mr. Walters sets his story in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, thus getting at the superstition in its purer and more virulent period. The whole hocus-pocus is admirably elucidated in the course of the novel: the pathetic gullibility of the peasantry, the half-belief of the hexen in his own powers, the precarious livelihood to be gained from love charms, fortune telling, and the repetition of formulas. As Mr. Walters explains the theory of hexerei, we see it as a remarkably interesting phenomenon.

Hexerei, however, is far from the whole novel. In addition, it is the gloomy tale of the Marson girls, three old maids who struggled vigorously against a continuously adverse fate. They were just plain queer, these girls—born to be old maids and to suffer torments of poverty, repression, and isolation. It was only natural that Elizabeth, the oldest, should take up the office of village hexen, when Blind Pete offered it to her on his deathbed. Later, Mary learned to deal with the simpler cases that came to them for advice and help, but Anne, the youngest, never gave in. Good fortune and the Marson girls were never intimates for long, however, and misery soon came to stay. Death ended the struggle that had been not so much gallant as dogged and despairing.

Mr. Walters writes persuasively, though never with a glossy surface. We feel that above all he is honest, that he is genuinely sympathetic with the three outcasts.

Throughout the novel he keeps an admirable balance between local color and universal human values. As a result we are moved and informed simultaneously, neither function of the narrative interfering with the other. Such a well executed novel is as rare as it is gratifying. To be sure, it is grim, and brutal with unrelieved sordidness, but somehow it manages to pull away from the dangerous bog of morbidity; it remains a notably meritorious piece of work. There should be many more such straightforward novels illuminating odd corners of our social life, but all too often local color degenerates into a sort of patronizing prettification.

In Tabloidia

HOT NEWS. By EMILE GAUVREAU. New York: The Macaulay Co. 1931. \$2.

Reviewed by CHARLES MCD. PUCKETTE

MR. GAUVREAU made for himself a definite place in the tabloid journalism (to stretch that word almost out of shape) of the past decade. The astounding growth of the *Daily News*, first in the field, to a sale of a million copies a day, drove one publisher of a standard size morning paper which had been hurt by the newcomer, to issue a rival tabloid in retaliation; the happy result was that his standard size paper only suffered the more. Still another publisher, famous for lurid magazines, thought he saw an opportunity for an evening tabloid, and forthwith produced in New York a sheet, the nature of which probably made the *News* think poignantly of changing its size rather than be regarded as related to it as a member of the tabloid family. Many a reader who shudders at the sight of any newspaper of small page size, is ignorant of the very real and important differences there are between the enterprising *News* and New York's other smaller size journals. Class distinctions exist in Tabloidia. Mr. Gauvreau, with ingenuity and energy, directed the one which plumbed new depths in newspaper making and has now moved his talents over to the *Mirror*.

The story of his editorship is "Hot News." Somewhere in the publisher's hand-

outs Mr. Gauvreau is quoted as saying that the book reflects "an era of mad journalism which we will never see again. I believe in tabloid journalism. . . . I was swept away in the hectic struggle for circulation. My book is written to point out the futility of such a scramble, and the tragedies." Elsewhere it is also announced that this "devastating" novel will shake all America with its revelations. The name of Mr. Gauvreau's paper, his associates, and the wretched personalities exploited in news stories are so little disguised that even a tabloid reader can identify them.

The most sensitive seismograph will be unable to feel America shake. The book is disappointing. It is wordy and unreal. Perhaps the author, living in an atmosphere of so-called "confessions," felt obliged to cast his story in the same form. But the real reason why this "Hot News" is so lukewarm is that there is little to tell of this style of journalism which is not plain for any reader to see and know. It is hardly a revelation to let the public in on the secret that the tabloid thought that "people are really interested only in two things, sex and money—and in that order." The circulation manager added murder to these two noble interests. Later in the book women and murder take first and second place. Nor is it news to disclose that the publicity loving man, "Sugar Plum," whose amatory escapades and marriage to a young tabloidess attracts attention, were exploited and led on by Mr. Gauvreau's paper. It is not entirely a new thing for a newspaper to exploit celebrities, to whip up a false interest in them. The tabloid's contribution was to exploit less than nonentities, and to take its readers into the bedrooms of the pathetic people who were the day's sensations. Equally plain were the dodges to gain circulation by cheap fakes and stunts. Nothing could be more transparent than tabloid journalism—and so the revelations of "Hot News" are not there. Even the parts which deal with political control of vice and speakeasies are tame stuff—enough to make a young reporter yawn and put an older one to sleep.

One lesson in newspaper making the novel may contain. Circulation was easy to get—circulation of the kind which such journalism attracted. But advertising was not. Catchpenny and misleading advertis-

ing which victimized the readers was obtained, but reputable companies did not wish to place their announcements in columns near the cooked-up hot news. So there is hope that the pestilence will subside. And if tabloid journalism proves conclusively that good advertising will not pay alongside of cheap trash and untruths, there may have been this slight justification for its existence.

Recent Events in Disguise

MONEY MAN. By HERMAN MICHELSON. New York: Vanguard Press. 1931. \$2.

Reviewed by JAMES R. DANIELS

HERE is another example of soda fountain literature; a squirt of this, a blob of that, and a scoop of something else, twirled in the electric shaker and gulped quickly. To be forgotten as soon as consumed. It follows the current pattern of exploiting news events, lightly disguised, while the headlines are still large and black.

"Money Man" is the head of the Bank of the Confederation, an institution which ballooned from the obscurity of a private bank on New York's East Side to a many-armed financial octopus with millions in deposits. The Confederation won its depositors by appeals to racial prejudice, by reckless loans, and by a slap-dash, hail-fellow heartiness which they found cheering after the cathedrallike calm and austere impersonality of other banks. Its officers practised every form of financial chicanery. The process by which millions are created from thin air and placed on the bank's books is explained so that the average reader may follow an easy path through the jungle of subsidiary corporations and double dealings.

For any one who has read the newspapers in recent months, the labels on the supposedly fictitious characters are entirely transparent. Whatever merit the book possesses is imparted solely by its timeliness. While the sour smell of a huge bank failure lingers in New York, a number of readers may care to pass an afternoon with this retelling of the rise and fall of the "bank built on quicksand." The daily news stories were, on the whole, more vital and interesting.

Messrs. Harper & Brothers Have the Honor to Announce The Publication on August Seventeenth Of the Fifth Harper Prize Novel "Brothers In The West" By Robert Raynolds

THE JUDGES: Carl Van Doren, Ellen Glasgow, Bliss Perry. PREVIOUS WINNERS: 1923—The Able McLaughlins, by Margaret Wilson. 1925—The Perennial Bachelor, by Anne Parrish. 1927—The Grandmothers, by Glenway Wescott. 1929—The Dark Journey, by Julian Green.

Foreign Literature

From Magic to Reality

LE CHEMINEMENT DE LA PENSÉE.
By E. MEYERSON. Paris: Alcan. 1931.

Reviewed by ABEL CHEVALLEY.

MR. MEYERSON'S new book is like all others: it should be read and digested before one attempts to criticize it. I have just read a review of his former book, "Identity and Reality," in one of the leading American reviews. "Science," says the reviewer, "shows a constant conflict between the tendency of reason to insist upon identity in things, and the counter-tendency of the senses to accept the reality of change. . . . A good part of nature remains unamenable to scientific law—in a word, has remained irrational."

In the light of that "irrationality" the reviewer discovers some "vulnerable spots" in Mr. Meyerson's doctrine.

There is an irresistible drollery in such remarks, at least for those who remember that Mr. Meyerson himself has not only discovered, but incessantly exposed that very same "irrationality" now opposed to him, and has made of it the foundation of his doctrine. Nobody before Meyerson had used the term of "irrational" as a substantive in the sense now adopted by everybody. When writing "Identity and Reality" twenty-three years ago, Mr. Meyerson knew and said that in using the word "irrational" and broadening the notion of "irrationality" he was innovating. He even said that he was not without "misgivings" as to the advisability of creating a new term. The fact that he can now be rebuked by an able American reviewer not only in the name,

but with the name, of what he has discovered, does not only betray a certain heedlessness in criticism. It also shows the extent to which his ideas, somewhat paradoxical twenty-three years ago, have spread and been accepted. In fact, they have become common property. They are an unconscious part of modern thinking.

Those who entertained lingering doubts about the psychological breadth of Meyerson's doctrine will find conviction in his three fine new volumes (the last, of notes) published under the title "Le Cheminement de la Pensée." Till now, Mr. Meyerson seemed to confine himself to the study of epistemology, that is of scientific thought. Now his conclusions are concerned with thought in general, from common sense, even primitive thought, down to the deduction of contemporary mathematicians. "From Magic to Reality" might well be the subtitle of his summa of logic and psychology.

"The Development of Thought." . . . Does Mr. Meyerson study it as a logician or a psychologist? a historian or a philosopher? This is really an unanswerable question. The method of Meyerson, now fully revealed, has a touch of all methods and yet remains absolutely original. He is not so much interested in the results attained by scientific, and, in a general way, by intellectual research, as in "the trains of thought which have been followed up in arriving at the results." This enables him to put on common ground primitive and modern man, the prelogical and the logical, in the same manner as he recently discovered in Einstein a sort of new Descartes

("Deduction Relativiste"). The theory of knowledge, which Mr. Meyerson is thus building up, being independent of the objects of knowledge, can, in certain of its aspects, be said to be "phenomenological" (in Husserl's sense of the word). But all labels are misleading. Until Meyerson, the philosophers and scholars who studied the development of thought, whether it were Leibnitz or Kant, studied it in connection with contemporary science, its postulates, its results. In consequence, they found themselves quickly left behind by new discoveries. On the contrary, it is by studying the old *phlogiston* that Meyerson discovered how the contemporary scientist goes to work when starting on the path of invention. It is by referring to the experience of the man in the street, to his intellectual conception of the world, that he makes us understand the regularity with which there reappear at steady intervals in modern science, ancient atomic and monistic theories, Platonic or Baconian ideas.

The essence of Meyerson's solution is contained in a single phrase. In order to solve the enigma of the development of thought, even the contradiction which it seems to contain within itself, it is sufficient to remember always that "*it ends with identity, but starts with diversity.*" The thoughts of Voltaire or those of a water-carrier follow the same path. The living world and the world of logic are both implicated in, and exclusive of, each other. This paradox, which is at the bottom of all epistemology, is also at the core of all thought, even of mathematical thought. To be able to identify something, one must first imagine the thing in concrete and different forms.

Mr. Meyerson is pleased to declare himself, not without a touch of mischief, a disciple of Antisthenes the Cynic. We know the scorn with which Plato exposed his doctrine. Antisthenes held that all affirmation which is not tautology implies contradiction. When I say that the swan is white, this presupposes that "white" is something different from "swan," or else my words mean nothing. Unfortunately, it comes back to saying that "swan" is different from "swan." The paradox of Antisthenes will never prevent anyone from reasoning, but it compels us to agree that thought affirms simultaneously identity and distinctness.

After this one understands how Mr. Meyerson can oppose identity to reality, experience to logic, without denying the legitimacy of knowledge. Far from so doing, he refutes both the Pragmatists and the Bergsonians who believe that knowledge is born of a concern for utility. He, on the contrary, affirms in fact that knowledge and even commonsense have, before everything else, a disinterested object, that of explanation: explanation of the diverse by the identical, of the concrete by the abstract. The amazing part of it is, without doubt, that our abstractions can afterwards be applied to reality, and that there can be experimental sciences whose progress follows that of mathematics. Must we conclude that thought contains the essence of reality, and so come back to idealism? No, replies Mr. Meyerson, and for two reasons. The first is that idealism leads to the negation of the external object which is indispensable to knowledge. The second, that knowledge, like common sense, is inextricably bound up with irrational things, as, for instance, sensation, or the idea of irreversibility of time. The essence of thought is therefore not identity but the process of identification, that is, a development, a *progress* which moves ceaselessly from emotion to logic, from difference to oneness, from concrete to abstract.

It is impossible to give a summary of the enormous work of Mr. Meyerson. In the first book he states the problem, gives an indication of his solution, touching on the most recent theories of knowledge and recent investigations of primitive mentality. In the second, he studies the "proposition," i. e., logic in its classical form. The third volume is devoted to the study of mathematical reasoning, and here he confronts the theories of the intuitivists and those of the logicians. Then, in a last book, devoted to reasoning other than mathematical, a close study of the classification of the sciences and of the general principles of experience enables the author to generalize on his conception of the "zigzag march, the winding road" of rationalization. A fairly short conclusion insists particularly on the opposition of the thesis of Mr. Meyerson to that of panmathematism.

In some ways, the thought of Meyerson may appear both paradoxical and trenchant, dismissing the Platonist, the Pragmatist, the pure idealist, and the pure man of action. They all pass by, in opposite ways,

beside truth, eternally double-faced, but always true to herself, even in her duplicity. Physicists who would fain reconcile abstract and concrete, mind and matter, in a general theory, will lose all hope if they once agree to penetrate into the inflexible Meyersonian labyrinth. There is both conflict and harmony in Meyerson's reality. The progress and the equilibrium of his thought, yea, of all thought, is at that price. But his system is nevertheless a system; nothing less could satisfy him, or us. But there is no stiffness in its thickness, nothing dry or dogmatic. The abundance of quotations, the quiet, unostentatious, charming, and yet most effective *bonhomie* of the digressions, often recall Montaigne. Mr. Meyerson's starting point may be as specialized as he likes it to appear, as limited as you may like it to be presented. His lifelong investigation into the ways and by-ways of human reason has at last broadened out into a delightful and universal wisdom.

Two German Women Poets

DIE GELIEBTEN DINGE. Bilder und Verse. By RUTH SCHAUMANN. Munich: Kösel und Pustet. 1931.

DANK DES LEBENS. By ERIKA MITTERER. Frankfurt am Main: Rutten und Loening. 1931.

Reviewed by A. W. G. RANDALL

AMONG the younger German poets of today both Ruth Schaumann and Erika Mitterer have an assured position. The first secured general recognition some years ago, and any representative anthology of contemporary German lyric poetry must contain examples of her work. The second, a younger woman—she is twenty-three—has called forth the praise of well-known German critics, such as Ernst Lissauer; in fact, since his critical essay on her work, which appeared about a year ago in the Berlin monthly review, *Die Literatur*, she may be considered as having "arrived."

Ruth Schaumann has a most interesting personality. She was born in Hamburg in 1899 and spent her early girlhood in that city. She then went to study art in Munich and gained a considerable local reputation for her sculpture, which she eventually took up professionally. This is worth noting, for that critic who, six years ago, discussed her poetry as "plastische Lyrik," showed, with ample justification, the relation which exists between the two forms of art to which she has devoted herself. Ruth Schaumann's first volume of poems was published in 1920; it was entitled "Die Kathedrale"—and here it may be remarked that this poet is a Catholic, whose faith and philosophical background inform her poetry almost uniformly. Four years later appeared a lyrical play called "Die Glasbergkinder," and another collection of lyrics entitled "Der Knospengrund." In 1926 "Das Pasionale," another volume of lyrics, appeared and won general recognition. In the meantime, also, Ruth Schaumann was publishing short stories and essays on artistic subjects; she was also producing work in other artistic mediums, and some of her excellent colored woodcuts illustrate the latest collection of her poetry which is here under review. She had also illustrated "Das Pasionale" with drawings which called forth as much praise as the poetry which they accompanied.

Those who have surveyed the whole of Ruth Schaumann's work observe that it shows a marked evolution from the passionate richness of "Der Knospengrund" to the disciplined, austere writing of "Das Pasionale." "Die geliebten Dinge" is a simple revelation of the mysticism of common things—the human body, in fact, considered as an instrument of the spiritual life. The human associations are expressed in simple, affecting poetry; the whole collection is one of unalloyed delight for those who have not travelled too far from the fundamental realities.

Erika Mitterer, too, without being in any way a "realist," has a firm hold on the simple, essential realities, love, health, sickness, the breath of the early morning, the ecstasy of spring. Some of the best poems are love-poems, of a maidenly passionate kind; they are addressed to the poet's lover, and their sincerity and genuineness of expression are beyond all question. Among the collection is a remarkable translation of Victor Hugo's "Booz," whose idyllic beauty accords well with the temperament of the poet, though sometimes she rises to a note of passionate rhetoric.

Students of German poetry of today will look with interest for Erika Mitterer's next collection of lyrics; in her first there is promise, and not a little fulfilment as well.

A Book Especially Recommended
to Readers of

THE SATURDAY REVIEW
OF LITERATURE

The good people of the rock-ribbed Provençal village of Fantosque, high up among the sloping sun-warmed vineyards, will tell you, if you are curious, of three miraculous happenings that befell within a week of each other some seventy-odd years ago. One was the disappearance, in broad daylight, of the beautiful English woman, Lady Amabel Perrish; another was the mysterious way in which Father Boniface regained his lost faith, though remaining ever after a little queer in the head; and the third was the miracle of the Heaven-sent baby. Few of the Fantosquais who tell you these facts think of connecting them with the ruined medieval chapel on the hill high above the village. Partly, no doubt, because, unlike some people in PAN'S PARISH, they never had the experience of meeting the goat-god face to face among these ruins.

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PARISH

By Louise Redfield Peattie

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